



NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

The nation's oldest and largest community-based movement empowering African Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream.

July 7, 2004

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
c/o Natek Inc., Inc.
236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E.
Suite 110
Washington, D.C. 20002

Re: MB Docket No. 04-207

Dear Chairman Powell and Ms. Dortch:

We would like to voice our concerns about the potential affects of requiring cable and satellite companies to sell basic cable networks on a channel-by-channel, or "a la carte," basis. On the surface, this idea sounds appealing, but a deeper look can only lead to the conclusion that a la carte packaging would have a chilling effect on programming diversity in America.

While we are encouraged by the networks efforts to expand diverse programming in recent years, ethnic and minority populations in the U.S. are still acutely underserved by television's current offerings. As a result, many opinion leaders have called on media businesses to generate more channels to serve audiences of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and other ethnic groups. The imposition of an a la carte pricing model could bring these efforts to a screeching halt. Many of the channels that exist today will not be able to survive with the reduced subscriber base they will face under a la carte.

If cable and satellite companies sell channels a la carte, it would force networks to dramatically increase the per-subscriber fee they must charge. Ultimately, subscribers would find themselves paying about the same amount – and possibly more – for just a handful of channels, rather than having the hundreds from which to choose, as they do today.

With its multi-channel universe, cable provides a wealth of diverse resources allowing viewers the ability to share other cultures, communities, styles and viewpoints. The imposition of a la carte would drastically reduce, if not eliminate entirely, that opportunity.

A la carte directly challenges years of growth and expansion of diverse programming in today's media marketplace. As such, we urge the FCC to strongly consider the full ramifications of a la carte in their report to Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'm a', followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

Marc H. Morial
President & CEO
National Urban League

cc: Michele Moore, SVP, Marketing & Communications, National Urban League
William Spriggs, Executive Director, IOE, National Urban League
Suzanne Bergeron, Manager for Legislative Affairs, IOE, National Urban League